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ABSTRACT

To unravel some of the contradictions in opinions about the effect of mass media on viewers, an integration of mass media research and sound sociological theory is necessary. This paper reports the results of an attempt to apply sociological theories of socialization to a sample of Australian children and their reactions to film and television violence. Two comparison groups were selected from a large sample on the basis of "self-esteem," a variable hypothesized to be closely related to mass media usage. These groups responded to a questionnaire on television viewing habits and family background variables. They also took part in an experiment in which they viewed "fantasy" and "realistic" violence in films, after which they were interviewed on their responses. One result was that high-esteem males preferred factual shows to fantasies, whereas low-esteem males preferred fantasy shows with male protagonists. Females preferred fantasy shows with female protagonists, and low-esteem females preferred them more than do high-esteem ones. High-esteem males viewed realistic violence more objectively, on the whole, than did other groups. (JK)

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SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNING FROM FILM AND TELEVISION

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The study of mass-communication is an area in sociological research neglected by sociologists throughout the western world, but particularly in Australia. There is no evidence that new inroads will be made because of the difficulty and costliness of appropriate studies. What continues to emerge is a reiteration of the ideas and conclusions reached in the 'thirties and 'forties when mass communication was a v ital and productive field in sociological research. One major reason for the famine is the dearth of theory associated with mass communication research.

The debate surrounding most of the controversial issues involving mass media rests on opinion and prejudice based on unsound assumptions and glaring gaps in the variables considered. Perhaps the most serious of these gaps is the omission of the wider social context in which viewing takes place. Figures of hours spent watching are not modified by consideration of who watches with the child, what discussion follows, whether the child ignores or rejects values and behaviour not reinforced in his normal circles of interaction and so on. Either side in the debate can find evidence to support its case from the diverse results produced by experimental and survey studies. What is needed is an integration of mass media research with sound sociological theory in order to unravel some of the contradictions in the field.

This paper reports the results of an attempt to apply sociological theories of socialization to a sample of Australian children and their reactions to television and film violence. Two comparison groups were selected from a large sample on the basis of "self-esteem", a variable hypothesized to be closely related to mass media usage. These groups responded to a questionnaire on television viewing habits and family background variables; and were also exposed to an experimental situation in which they viewed "fantasy" and "realistic" violence in films, followed by detailed interviewing on their responses. The results reveal the usefulness of a more sociologically

and theoretically oriented approach to the study of mass media effects.

There is clear evidence that television provides a continually available source of knowledge[1], but not enough is known about the mechanisms involved. Moreover, information is only the first step in attitude formation, value acquisition and behavioural outcomes. Yet some claim that television information "causes" immorality, rebellion, delinquency. Socialization theorists are not so naive.

A basic mechanism by which people learn to accept values, attitudes, and forms of behaviour is the imposition of sanctions, either rewards or punishments, usually by someone with superior power or someone who is respected. Parents, for example, clearly have sanctioning power over children. They reward and punish for conformity to their expectations, and the way in which their sanctions are imposed is an important determinant of attitudes and learned behaviour. The child's family interaction will affect the influence of film and television upon him. We know that the child's internalization of norms and values is largely dependent upon such feedback from significant others, yet little research examines the different and perhaps more subtle feedback possibilities of television. For example, does an absence of attractive role models in real life increase the likelihood of accepting television substitutes? These questions are examined in detail elsewhere[2], but there is a clear need for a more active (or, rather, interactive) theory of socialization to be applied before we can understand the influence of television on children.

Sociological theory has long stressed both the effects of past experience on present self-views and meanings and the more deliberate self-selection of experience according to felt needs or goals. But mass media research has sought effects in isolated experimental conditions, or with surveys which, when analysed, control for the same variables - age, sex, intelligence and social class. Quantitative data cannot explore the past experience of individuals and without knowledge of that experience, then the self selection a viewer of

film or television does make cannot be evaluated meaningfully.

The groups a person belongs to are another strong socialization factor often ignored in media research. The findings of Riley and Riley[3] on peer group integration and the uses to which TV examples are put, and the suggestions by Himmelweit[4] and Hazard[5] relating the viewing of fantasy versus reality to feelings of insecurity and anxiety, suggest differential effects. Himmelweit showed that the shy, retiring, insec ure, maladjusted child may watch television excessively. Such children tend to be anxious and Hazard's hypothesis was that anxious people tend to watch fantasy programmes rather than realistic programmes. Hazard's results suggest that fantasy television has a primary audience of persons who are anxious, who avoid cultural contact, and who are of low social status, though viewers classified as high in manifest anxiety were only slightly more likely than others to choose programmes with high fantasy content. The spread in the relationship shown in the results is much too small to confirm his hypothesis that anxiety leads to a profound and direct search for fantasy content in television. But the fact that there was a tendency in the predicted direction indicated that there could be value in examining the relationship further and in exploring the social psychological factors involved in an investigation of the relationship between anxiety and perceptions of media.

It was Hazard's research which prompted the study on which this paper is based. I thought that the weakness in Hazard's hypothesis was the arbitrary definition of fantasy and realism. The content categories, in Hazard's research, formed a continuum, the polar extremes being factual material and pure fantasy, with intermediate steps for realistic fiction and non-realistic fiction, located at approximately equal intervals between two polar types. While Hazard checked his classifications with a number of independent raters it is not possible to use arbitrary classifications with responses

of individual perceptions. One man's fantasy is another man's realism.

While social and personality factors must be considered when specifying the conditions under which film and television programmes will affect certain groups, the life experiences of each individual determine a unique response to programmes which would cut across group classifications. I therefore hypothesized (1) that anxious children with low self-esteem will prefer to watch programmes unrelated to their real life experience, whereas self-confident children with high self-esteem will be more interested in realistic programmes; (2) that a child will be disturbed by something that relates to his own experience, but not by things outside that experience.

Measurement of Self-esteem

Self-esteem is regarded as an important sociological and psychological variable by personality theorists, clinicians and social psychologists, yet numerous studies give inconsistent views about the conditions that develop or inhibit self-esteem. The seeming lack of consistency in research findings has been put down in part to differing definitions and research designs. Several overlapping terms have been used - e.g., self-concept of ability, self-esteem, self-image, sense of personal worth, self-perception, self-report, self-evaluation, self-description. It seems clear that acceptance of self-esteem research is not possible without knowledge of the instrument used for the measurement and the definition of self-concept from which the instrument was derived. Many of the instruments lack validation.

Coopersmith[6] defined self-esteem in terms of evaluative attitudes towards the self. He measured both the behavioural and subjective expressions of self-esteem and validated his indices of esteem against a network of variables related to self-esteem. The basis for Coopersmith's and my own interest in the concept

is the belief that self-esteem is significantly associated with effective personal functioning and has pervasive and significant effects. Of relevance to this film and television study are indications that persons with low self-esteem suffer from feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, self-doubt and inferiority, which handicaps them in their work and social relationships. They are also less capable of resisting pressures to conform. The persons with high self-esteem are generally happier, believe in their own perceptions, assume an active role in social groups and express their views effectively and frequently.

Coopersmith defined self-esteem as

> "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself"[7].

The definition centres upon the relatively enduring estimate of general self-esteem rather than upon more specific and transitory changes in evaluation. Secondly, Coopersmith recognizes that self-esteem is multidimensional and may vary across different areas reflecting different experiences, different attributes and capacities, and it may vary according to sex, age, and other role-defining conditions. Thus he included questions relating to four areas; the home and family, the school, peer groups, and general personal interests and feeling, to determine the extent to which the appraisals for different areas differed. His analysis failed to reveal significant differences between the self-appraisal advanced for different areas of experience. The third feature of Coopersmith's definition is that by "self-evaluation" he means "a judgmental process in which the individual examines his performance, capacities and attributes according to his personal

standards and values, and arrives at a decision of his own worthiness".[8]

To measure self-esteem from the perspective of the subject Coopersmith developed a 50-item Self-Esteem Inventory with sub-scales relating to the four areas listed above, and carried out an in depth analysis of the meaning of self-esteem. He reported that at a relatively overt level manifest anxiety is negatively associated with self-esteem; that is, persons with positive self-attitudes tend to have low anxiety scores.

I tested Coopersmith's inventory with an Australian sample of 816 twelve to fourteen year olds, comprising 390 boys and 426 girls, which as a proportion closely represented the population of that age group in Victorian schools in 1971. An Item Analysis was carried out on the results to check the reliability of the sub-scales written into both the instruments by using Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of internal consistency. All scales had an acceptable alpha coefficient except the lie scale (.38) which did not work at all with this Australian sample. In addition to the scale analysis I subjected the data to factor analysis to check the dimensionality of the sub-scales and to see whether scale items overlapped for factors different from those indicated by the Coopersmith scale titles. The factor analytic evidence supported the scale analysis.

Sex differences were examined as a step toward selecting criterion groups for the film and television study. If major differences on the male and female scores had been evident this would have affected selection, but the difference in means was found to be not significant. On the basis of the analysis two criterion groups of boys and girls were selected. A score of 22 or less was taken as a low esteem measure and a score of 41 or more was taken as a measure of high esteem, so that 10.4% of the total sample fell into the high esteem criterion group and 9.3% fell into the low esteem group. These were closest to the intervals beyond one standard deviation above and below the mean.

The selected criterion groups were administered the General Sarason Anxiety Scale and a retest of the Coopersmith S.E.I. five months after they had filled in the S.E.I. for the first time. The retest of the S.E.I. was to check the retest reliability of the Coopersmith instrument over time. The Sarason General Anxiety Scale was used to check the correlation between a measure of anxiety and the sub-scales of the S.E.I.

The general pattern of the self-esteem scales compared with the Sarason General Anxiety Scale is consistent. All self-esteem sub-scales are negatively correlated (-.36 to -.53) with the Sarason General Anxiety Scale. The pattern was consistent over all sub-scales and is thus more than coincidental. The evidence suggests then that the S.E.I. provides a reliable measure of self-esteem which is negatively related to generalized anxiety.

High-Low Esteem Differences

The criterion groups (46 high esteem girls, 43 high esteem boys, 41 low esteem girls and 29 low esteem boys) were asked to fill in a sur-vey questionnaire which asked questions concerning their uses of mass media; time spent viewing; their favourite programmes; attitudes to violence, fantasy and realism in media portrayals; and questions relating to peers, school and family which further confirmed the findings of the self-esteem inventory. Reality is too elusive a concept to be pinned down definitively.

It can be argued that all film and television programmes, whether fiction, news, documentaries or live broadcasts are "created realities" which result only after a series of intervening decisions between the incident and the reporting of it. To say what reality is, we must make assumptions about the interpretive process, and one of the concerns of this paper is to see if what adults might define as reality on film and television compares with how children perceive reality.

Favourite programmes varied according to sex and esteem differences.

Examples of Differences in Most Favourite Programmes

TABLE 1

	MALE		FEMALE	
	High Esteem	Low Esteem	High Esteem	Low Esteem
1. Football RePLAY	54.35%	19.44%	18.87%	10.20%
2. Four Corners	23.91%	11.11%	11.32%	4.08%
3. Why is it So?	10.87%	2.78%	3.77%	0.0%
4. McHale's Navy	43.48%	58.33%	22.64%	24.49%
5. Hogan's Heroes	50.00%	58.33%	35.85%	30.61%
6. Land of the Giants	30.43%	52.78%	30.19%	36.73%
7. F Troop	30.43%	58.33%	30.19%	24.49%
8. Family Affair	10.87%	13.89%	26.42%	32.65%
9. Nanny & the Professor	23.91%	13.89%	22.64%	53.06%
10. I Dream of Jeannie	21.74%	30.56%	32.08%	61.22%
11. The Flying Nun	6.52%	11.11%	26.42%	40.82%
12. Mod Squad	58.70%	58.33%	75.47%	73.47%
13. Mission Impossible	50.00%	41.67%	35.85%	22.45%
14. Homicide	56.52%	63.89%	56.60%	57.14%
15. Division 4	56.52%	72.22%	60.38%	69.39%

Respondents were asked to mark in whether a programme was one of their favourites. I have selected fifteen examples which illustrate the pattern in the responses. Programmes 1-3 are reality based, sport, current affairs and science information programmes in that order. The high esteem boys prefer these programmes to all other groups. Programmes 4,5,6 and 7 are fictional programmes where the protagonists

are male. There is a clear male preference for these programmes, with more low esteem males rating them as one of their favourite programmes than the high esteem males. Programmes 8-11 are fictional programmes where the main protagonist is female. The girls prefer these programmes more than the boys, with the low esteem girls listing them as most favourite more often than the high esteem girls. Programmes 12, 13, 14 are spy, police, action dramas. These programmes are generally popular with all groups. It may be that the regular presence of a female in the Mod Squad, who participates,or is rescued by, the male protagonists makes this programme more popular with the girls in the sample than the other action programmes. Eighty programme responses were analysed in detail and showed the same patterns as those outlined above - a general liking for action packed dramas, clear sex identification, a high esteem preference for information and current affairs programmes. In the ranking of programmes, high esteem groups preferred what Smythe has called "real" programmes, that is, orientation and information rather than entertainment programmes,[9] more often than the low esteem groups.

Low esteem groups were found to have fewer books in their homes, to listen to the radio more, to be more likely to own a transistor, to read fewer magazines and newspapers, to attend the cinema more often, to be less likely to belong to a library, borrow fewer books and spend more time watching television than the high esteem groups.

TABLE 2: No. of Hours spent watching television per week

	MALE		FEMALE	
	High	Low	High	Low
40 hours +	4.35%	27.78%	9.43%	24.49%
Less than 20 hours	45.65%	19.45%	56.61%	25.45%

Low esteem children were more likely to quarrel with their siblings over television; were more likely to be upset or annoyed if they missed their favourite television show because it was important to them; less likely to discuss television with their mother or father; were less likely to want changes in television programming; were more likely to regard television as "something to do" than high esteem children.

More low esteem children said they had been worried, kept awake, or had a nightmare from something they had seen on television. More low esteem children agreed that they forgot everything else when they watched television, thought there was something wrong with people who didn't watch television, and said television stopped them feeling lonely. With all the responses mentioned, the patterns related to esteem rather than sex. The data clearly show that visual media are far more important in the lives of low esteem children than in the lives of high esteem children.

Reactions to Film Violence

The next stage of the research involved showing the criterion groups three feature films in a realistic but controlled theatre setting. The experimental interview investigation was meant to explore the more intricate responses of individuals, which are usually lost in the more simplified, categorized responses of quantified survey data.

Following each film twenty-two interviewers interviewed twenty two viewers, while the other viewers filled in a questionnaire answering the same questions asked by the interviewers. 73 viewers, comprising 22 high esteem girls, 23 high esteem boys, 16 low esteem girls and 12 low esteem boys saw the films on the first day. The films were screened in the following order: Our Mother's House, The Dirty Dozen and The War Game. On the following day The Dirty Dozen was screened first, followed by The War Game and Our Mother's House to a total group of 86 viewers, comprising 24 high esteem

girls, 20 high esteem boys, 25 low esteem girls and 17 low esteem boys. The total viewer group included 44 interviewees and 115 who filled in questionnaires over the two day period. The films were screened in a different order to control for different responses resulting either from a fatigue factor or the impact of one film on another interfering with responses.

The interviewers, who had all viewed the films and conducted training interviews, were instructed to follow the questions outlined on the interview questionnaire, but were to follow up any subject the viewer wanted to talk about. The interview data were later compared with the responses written by viewers. The questions asked after each film related to the viewer's enjoyment of the film; their recollection of what happened in the film; what they thought was the message of the film; whether the viewer thought the story could happen in real life; which parts of the film were most real and unreal; which parts were exciting, frightening, upsetting, cruel, unpleasant, funny; which characters they liked most and least; whether any parts of a film reminded them of anything that had ever happened to them; whether they would like to see the film again; any other comments on the film they wanted to make.

I do not claim that the findings are established in an exact scientific manner. In some cases the interviewers may have led the respondent to some extent, in other cases the respondents may have held back information. However, the subjects' answers provide some interesting data which illuminate the survey data and indicate areas for further research. It is only through an integration of varied research techniques, with their limitations, that progress can be made in this complex field.

The three films were chosen from an adult viewpoint as representing fantasy violence (The Dirty Dozen), realistic violence (The War Game), and a film combining realism and fantasy (Our

Mother's House)..

The Dirty Dozen is an impossible mission World War II film of enormous violence. It concerns a group of twelve convicted U.S. Army prisoners sentenced to hanging or hard labour for crimes of murder and rape. The men are offered the possibility of pardon through Project Amnesty. They must train and carry off a dangerous behind-the-lines mission, involving an attack on a French Chateau used by high ranking German officers as a recreation centre. The aim of the exercise is to kill as many German officers as possible and Major Reisman (Lee Marvin) is given the job of training the dirty dozen and leading the mission. The first part of the film involves their training and preparation.

The second part of the film shows the attack on the French chateau at night. The operation proceeds as planned until Maggot, a sex maniac and a religious fanatic, slits a woman's throat and starts shooting. Chaos and panic ensue. The Germans and their women run into the cellars, where they are entombed and blown up with gasoline and hand grenades thrown into the vents. Only three of the original fourteen survive - the Major, the M.P. and one member of the dirty dozen who was the most trustworthy.

The film is exciting and violent, filled with action, suspense and humour. It was described by the director, Robert Aldrich, as a film about the redemption of men. It has been described also by a reviewer as an immoral film that fails to make the point that the men are potent heroes for precisely the same reason that society imprisoned them.

The second film, The War Game, is made as a documentary of a simulated atomic attack on Britain. The film describes the events that could lead up to a nuclear attack. It opens by showing maps indicating the deployment of British nuclear bomber bases, the areas which could be attacked by Russian missiles, and the plans for evacuation. Events in Berlin and Vietnam are shown as the catalyst which could lead to the holocaust.

The next part of the film shows the actual nuclear attack, the destruction, killing, suffering and the subsequent behaviour of the people who are left.

Throughout, the camera lingers on the suffering of the people. The film is so shocking in its impact that it was banned from the B.B.C. in England for fear of the panic such a film might cause. Such a film may appear to be an extreme choice but it was chosen because of its strong impact, as all children in this age group are now used to seeing scenes of war daily in newsreels on television. It had to be a film which covered more than the usual war scenes shown by news reporters.

The third film Our Mother's House combines realism and fantasy in a story revolving around a family of seven children. It begins startlingly with the death of the children's mother. The children decide they will keep her death a secret so they will not be placed in an orphanage, and bury their mother in the backyard. Elsa, the eldest, assumes the mother role, discharges the housekeeper (Mrs.Quail) and the children attempt to maintain family unity. Jimminee learns to forge his mother's signature and the children cash their mother's social security cheque regularly. From time to time, or when there is a crisis to be faced, the children have "mother time". They go to the outhouse in the garden, "Our Mother's House" where mother's things have been taken, and through Dinah, the second eldest girl, they "talk" with the mother. Dinah goes into a trance, rocks backwards and forwards and conveys the dead mother's intentions.

Against this supernatural setting the children are shown playing happily, going to school and coping with the day to day problems of keeping house. One day Gertie (about 7) accepts a ride on a stranger's bike. During "mother time" Dinah says Gertie must be punished by having her long hair cut off. Gertie screams and screams as her beloved hair is cut. Gertie gets very sick and Hugh, the eldest son, afraid she will die, writes to their father.

Charlie, the father, returns at a critical point, when the school teacher is trying to force her way into the mother's bedroom to find out what is happening in the house. Charlie transforms the children's lives, buys a car, takes them on outings, plays with them, has parties, drinks, bets on the horses and goes to bed with women. With the exception of Elsa, the children love him.

Elsa demonstrates to the others that Charlie is using all their money and planning to mortgage the house. The children decide to confront Charlie as a group one night when he comes home half drunk. Charlie loses his temper and says he's sick of their sanctimonious view of their mother, who was a whore. He tells them that not one of them belongs to him and he picks up a picture of the mother and burns it. Seeing this, Dinah, upset, picks up a poker and hits Charlie on the head, killing him. Following the realization of what has happened, the children leave the house to go and tell the neighbouring doctor everything that has occurred.

This film was chosen because it involved children in a number of realistic situations they may be able to identify with - the death of a parent, a broken marriage, family rows, keeping secrets from adult authorities: these were combined with unlikely fantasy elements - successfully concealing the mother's death, successful deception of the bank manager, contact with the dead mother through spiritualist seances.

I have described the films in some detail so that the reader has a clear idea of what the themes and incidents are that the children are responding to.

A quantitative summary of results follows and then patterns which emerged in the interview responses are discussed in some detail to indicate how rich can be the results of such an approach.

TABLE 3

VIEWER RESPONSES TO THE THREE FILMS

	Female Self-Esteem				Male Self-Esteem			
	HIGH		LOW		HIGH		LOW	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The Dirty Dozen								
Liked the film	97.65	2.17	94.77	4.86	97.44	2.32	100	0
Thought it could happen	75.95	23.87	82.62	7.29	71.92	25.52	72.24	27.52
Thought it was exciting	100	0	89.91	0	97.44	2.32	96.32	3.44
Thought it was frightening in parts	10.85	82.46	14.58	55.89	46.40	53	34.80	65.36
Reminded of personal experience	6.51	82.46	14.58	55.89	0	100	0	100
Wanted to see it again	60.76	34.72	58.32	38.88	67.28	32.48	75.68	24.08
The War Game								
Liked the film	10.85	88.96	4.86	92.34	37.12	60.32	20.64	76.12
Thought it could happen	100	0	94.77	2.43	97.44	2.32	96.32	3.44
Thought it was exciting	23.87	75.95	7.29	87.48	34.80	62.64	37.84	51.60
Thought it was frightening in parts	34.72	15.19	51.03	19.44	97.44	9.28	72.24	27.52
Reminded of personal experience	15.19	80.29	19.40	75.30	2.32	95.12	10.32	82.56
Wanted to see it again	6.51	91.14	4.86	92.34	30.16	64.96	24.08	65.36
Our Mother's House								
Liked the film	93.31	6.51	82.62	12.15	78.88	20.88	65.36	30.96
Thought it could happen	71.61	28.31	63.18	24.30	60.32	39.44	55.04	41.28
Thought it was exciting	71.61	26.04	46.17	41.31	60.32	37.48	55.04	41.28
Thought it was frightening in parts	69.44	30.38	70.47	21.87	27.84	69.60	34.40	65.36
Reminded of personal experience	13.02	84.63	21.87	70.47	18.56	78.88	30.96	61.92
Wanted to see it again	36.89	58.59	48.66	38.88	18.56	74.24	37.84	58.48

All groups liked The Dirty Dozen, and thought it was an exciting film. It disturbed very few of them, despite the spectacular violence, and a majority in all groups wanted to see it again. The War Game was liked least. There is a marked sex difference in the responses to this film. Fewer girls liked the film than boys, but within the sex groups more high esteem subjects liked The War Game than low esteem subjects, with 37.12% of the high esteem boys saying they liked the film and 30.16% wanting to see it again. Our Mother's House was more popular with the girls than the boys, but again within the sex groups the high esteem groups liked the film more than the low esteem groups. However, it is the low esteem groups in both sexes who are more interested in seeing Our Mother's House again. With each film there are more children in the low esteem groups who were reminded of some personal experience by the films.

While the quantitative data supports the hypothesis that anxious children with low self esteem will prefer to watch programmes unrelated to their real life experience, and self-confident children with high self esteem will be more interested in realistic programmes, it is the detailed interview data which demonstrates most clearly the effects of past experience on present self-views and meanings, and the deliberate self-selection of film details and information according to the child's past socialization. While there are patterns for the different esteem groups, individual responses within groups are sometimes quite opposite as a result of individual experience.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that, although it is stressed that The War Game was a simulated documentary and was based on what might happen, nearly all children believed it to be real. Their responses included - Low esteem females - "all real, too real". "This film was most real. Camera interview, etc. made it seem real; plus pictures of people, burns, etc. People were really distressed. Real, not acting." High esteem females - "It wasn't fiction like the first film". "There was more factual information in it - what radiation would do - all the long term effects - it showed people

being killed in the way that people are killed nowadays in war - shooting of men who obstructed police - it reminded me of newsreels of Ulster and Vietnam. The fire and the riots too, remind me of newsreels". "I think this story must have happened to be filmed".

Low esteem males - "Others just stories. This was a documentary, not a film. This is real, could happen".

High esteem males - "Most real film - it wasn't a film, more like a report. They didn't act it - it was in real life - showed what happens". "The first film (O.M.H.) was a story. The second (W.G.) was true. None of it was unreal, even though I wish it was".

These responses represent only a few from each group. Clearly these children, who have grown up with television, accept news portrayals as "fact". Even where they realized that the attack on Britain had not happened there is confusion in their answers. Television news information is part of the regular life experience of children and when shown the information of the effects of nuclear war in news form they were disturbed and upset. All groups described the film as cruel, frightening, upsetting, shocking, sickening and horrible.

The differences were in their ability to cope with the information. The high esteem boys were best able to objectify the film and discuss it. Several took a reforming line and said The War Game "should be shown to people in other countries - make them think". "Would be good to put it on T.V. so more people could see it". In addition, others found it "interesting", "educational", "learnt something new", "I think it sets you thinking", "I did not enjoy the film but I'm glad I've seen it. I would like other people to see it", "I did not enjoy the facts that were brought forward but I found it interesting. I didn't enjoy it because it showed how destructive man is to himself. I found it interesting because it made me aware of things I did not previously know. I would like to see this film telecast all over the world, especially to leaders of nuclear powers".

Fewer low esteem boys or girls in either group were able to

discuss The War Game other than its immediate impact on them.

Low esteem boys - "Didn't like the film - not like a war film. I don't know the purpose of the film". "Horrible - couldn't tell why". "Gruesome". "Horror film". "Made me sick". "Would rather not know about what might happen later because I want to enjoy life while I can".

High esteem girls - "Hated War Game. I didn't like to see all the people suffering". "Terrible - agonising - bloodthirsty - hate news - like movies better - people dying, knowing people die like that". "Seeing how people die is frightening". "Death upsets me. I think this show is one of the cruellest I have seen". "Just couldn't watch it".

Low esteem females gave similar overall comments generally of horror, fear, distress, with an unwillingness to discuss the film, but there was the exceptional response. "In a way it is good because it showed what could happen if we don't do something about our nuclear weapons. It is very tragic and one really finds it hard to believe that such things could happen with so many people injured or killed. The War Game is very distressing ... It is hard to believe what can happen in a war. If it were to happen to me I just don't know what to do. I wouldn't like to see the show at all if it were in colour. It is very upsetting to see so many people getting killed or injured."

The response of the same low esteem female subject to The Dirty Dozen demonstrates how the entire sample differentiated between the war, destruction and death of The War Game and the war, spectacular violence and death in The Dirty Dozen. She said,"The Dirty Dozen is also a war film but it is a different kind of war. The War Game has everything destroyed, burned and many people killed. The Dirty Dozen is just about men attacking a certain house".

Generally The Dirty Dozen was seen as an action packed, exciting, war film, which was fun to watch. Responses from low esteem girls included - "Not really cruel. Would have been less cruel to shoot them (the Germans) when they were moving across the lobby rather than lock them in the cellar ... I like war films". "Exciting - putting petrol down the vents - blowing it up ..". "I enjoyed the

film very much. I would like to say that if I ever see a better war film I will be very surprised".

High esteem females - "Cruel? No. See one person shot, you've seen them all. Act of war ordinary, everyday". "Like somebody telling you a story, therefore not frightening, only exciting". "No I wasn't upset because I knew it was only a film". "Unpleasant when all the people were trapped in the basement, but this is part of war".

Low esteem males - "Dramatic and spectacular - Better side of war - not as horrifying as War Game". "I've seen so many war films, they don't upset me any more. It was an exciting film". "Like war films. Didn't show anything too cruel".

High esteem males - "Upset when all the people were trapped - pouring petrol. But I suppose they had to be killed". "Hardly ever see war time films where it all happens - usually cut out violence. The Dirty Dozen was an act". "Exciting - blowing up the Germans - shooting and blowing up the trucks ... a lot of action and it was fast". "Shooting was unpleasant but it was good". "Things that happened were expected - that is if they go behind enemy lines some expect to be killed - natural thing to happen". "Not upset - only a film and the situation was not real". "Most exciting film, fun as well, and when shot in the end not killed like people in The War Game".

In all groups the respondents interpreted The Dirty Dozen through the conventions used to tell an exciting war story on film. They saw it as real in the sense of being involving or looking realistic, but they accepted the convention of the plot structure, (" ... some expect to be killed". "But I suppose they had to be killed",) so the enemy and the dirty dozen had to die. The children were not upset with death but how people died. One low esteem boy said he was upset "when the soldier was shot between the eyes - never seen this before - felt sick". Later, when asked if he would like to see the film again. he replied, "Yes, I'd like to see the shot between the

eyes again - see the bullet wound".

We are, perhaps, too ready to assume that if a child says he was upset by seeing something, then the experience must be harmful.

The third film, Our Mother's House, has a much less clear-cut response from the viewers. Many of the girls, both high and low esteem groups, liked it "because it was sad". "I enjoyed it because it was sad, about children living by themselves and struggling to survive". "I like sad films which have children in them". "Made me cry - sad for the kids alone. Whenever I see this kind of film I cry - I like sentimental films".

On the other hand, many of the low esteem boys disliked the film because it was sad. "Sad - cried after the mother's death. Could really happen". "I hate sad things, upsetting film. I really felt I was in it". "Sad. Cruel - Charlie telling them about their mother". "Sorry for the children because of the way they were living".

Few of the high esteem boys referred to the film as sad but talked about the secti ons they were either sceptical about or very involved in.

All children in all groups disliked Charlie, the father, and saw him as cruel because he used the children who loved and trusted him. Their concern and feeling was for Di, who killed him, and they thought Charlie deserved to die. My adult reaction to Charlie was much more sympathetic than the children's reactions/

There was clear identification with the children in the film by many of the viewers. One female high esteem viewer said "I like it. The children were the same age as us and it could've happened to us ... Charlie had it coming to him anyway".

There was more reference by the low esteem viewers, both boys and girls, to the unhappy family relationships in the film being similar to their own family experience. This supports the findings of the Self Esteem Inventory, that low esteem children relate less well in their home and family situation with their parents and siblings than do high esteem children.

The responses from low esteem girls included "I have three brothers and three sisters. We don't stick together like in the films". "Story about how kids kept together - nice about the kids - different from everyday fighting". "Real when father yelling at them (children) and when children fighting amongst themselves", "I didn't really enjoy this film. It frightened me. The film somehow made me think of myself ... Almost the whole thing was real. I think a lot of kids could feel like that because I sometimes feel some of the things I think were in the film." Question: "Does the film remind you of anything?" "Yes. The father telling his children that they were bastards. The father always yelling". "Real where the man loses his temper and shouts".

Low esteem boys - "Disliked father. Whenever anything went wrong he took it out on the kids". "As their father screamed at them seemed real, because fathers are screaming in real life. So do mothers". This boy went on to say he was upset when Charlie pushed Dianna on to the floor. His father had come home drunk once and pushed his little sister. He, too, felt very angry and felt like punching his father. He said "It was cruel when the father was yelling at his children to get out. When he left the kids all alone to care for themselves - When he came home drunk". Another low esteem boy said "The whole thing was real. Real when the girl hit the father on the head. Anyone can have a grumpy father and feel like hitting them like that. Sometimes I feel like that towards my mother and father".

Although high esteem males and females also expressed dislike of Charlie, the father in the film, they did not give personal examples of experiences with their own fathers. Two high esteem girls said they had friends who had problems with their fathers, but they did identify strongly with the children. "I liked it because it was about children of our age. I felt more deeply for them than the soldiers. I thought the emotional sadness children suffered was real". Other high esteem girls and boys were quite uninvolved and bored by the film.

There is a wealth of material in the interview data which cannot be reported here but can be read elsewhere.[10] The responses to Our Mother's House varied enormously within groups and between groups - reactions to the mother's death; to Dianna finding Charlie in bed with a woman; to "mother-time"; to the threat to the children from outside authorities like the teacher, the bank-teller, the housekeeper; all reveal a richness of individual response which cannot be categorized. It depends so much on the individual's experience. One child is bored, another is totally involved with the same material, and what determines their response is the whole complex of social and personality factors governing each child's experience.

Generally all children enjoy an action programme like The Dirty Dozen. The high esteem groups, particularly the boys, are better able to objectively discuss The War Game. The girls, as a group, were more involved in Our Mother's House and their concerns centred around the vulnerability of the family, and concerns about being left without a parent. The low esteem boys who were involved with Our Mother's House were upset by the children's plight, the behaviour of the father and the death of the mother. What is real to children in a "fantasy" programme depends on their past experience and differs for each one. A choice of different films would, I am sure, draw different responses from the same group. Although they liked The Dirty Dozen , far more boys than girls found the film frightening in parts. This could well be because of sex-role identification. Boys can readily see themselves as soldiers, girls cannot. While our society continues to determine different roles for girls and boys, the sex factor in research will remain a dominant consideration in interpreting the influence of film and television on viewers. However, self-esteem has been shown to be another significant factor in understanding the complex interaction between the individual and his reac tions to and learning from film and television.

The accumulating research evidence, topped recently by the Surgeon General's Report[11] argues that viewing violence is harmful to children. There is nothing to support or refute that claim in the research discussed here, but there is clear evidence that children understand film conventions when they are presented in story form. The data show there is a need to educate children towards an understanding of the presentation of news and documentary film so they can develop as healthy a scepticism about the "facts" they see reported on news and documentary programmes as they appear to have toward film presentations of "fantasy" programmes.

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